

Bagging a Buck

Takes More Than Luck

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It's a beautiful fall morning—the air is cool and crisp, with a light frost on the ground. As a hunter enters the woods, his nose is overwhelmed with the smells of his surroundings, so he stops a moment to enjoy the majesty of nature. Then he walks to the ridge, to the spot he picked out months ago, from which he plans to bag the old, 10-point buck that has been eluding him for years.

When the hunter finally reaches his stand, he climbs to the top and starts arranging his gear. Unfortunately, he doesn't see a patch of ice and slips, falling to the ground. He smells the scent of the fall woods but for a moment, then passes out.

Although this account was fictitious, it's reminiscent of what actually happens every deer season around the United States when hunters ignore tree-stand safety.

The golden rule of tree-stand safety is always to wear some sort of harness while in the tree. You can find a wide variety in any hunting catalog. Just be sure to put on the harness as soon as you get in the stand, and keep it on until you quit for the day. Many hunters think you only need safety harnesses with climbing stands, but they're wrong—dead wrong. Regular, ladder tree stands usually are homemade and probably aren't structurally sound. Only one support leg or safety brace has to break before the hunter is thrown down 10 or more feet to the ground.

Another common mistake hunters make is insisting they carry all their gear and weapons up the tree stand at one time—a practice that's unsafe, clumsy and impractical. Instead of lugging everything up in one load, tie it to a rope. When you get to the top of the stand, strap on your harness and pull up your gear

with the rope. This method is better for two reasons: It prevents carrying a heavy load, and it allows the hunter to hoist the weapons [*unloaded, incidentally*] and gear separately.

The most overlooked aspect of tree-stand safety is the stand itself. Despite the variety of commercial products available for reasonable prices, some hunters insist on using a stand that is 15 years old. In many cases, these stands are deteriorated because of being subjected to the elements for so long. Even with using pressure-treated wood, a hunter can't expect a stand to last much longer than five years. I suggest that it's safer and cheaper to buy a commercially-made, metal ladder stand and haul it home at the end of each season.

If you do, you're more likely to find yourself in this scenario: You climb the same 15 steps every Saturday morning, thinking, "This may be the morning I get that elusive 10-point buck." One morning, you get to the top, don your safety harness, and start pulling up your gear when you slip. The harness catches you, though, and, in a few more minutes, you're set for the morning hunt. No sooner do you get situated than the old 10-point buck rambles by, following a doe. You raise your gun, smiling, because you know it's going to be a good day.

Tree-stand safety is no joke. It literally can make or break a hunting trip. Follow these tips and come home smiling. 🍖

For more info, go to: <http://hunting.about.com/od/deerbiggame/a/aa120199.htm>, <http://www.deerhunters.net/articles/treestandssafety.htm>, or <http://www.dnr.state.md.us/nrp/education/ts.html>.